

IN THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims replaces all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

1-103. (canceled)

104. (withdrawn) A method for treating at least one of sleep apnea and snoring in a human or an animal having an oropharyngeal region with lateral and posterior walls, the method comprising:

providing an appliance comprising at least one element having a length extending from a first end to a second end, the appliance comprising a central body portion between end portions adjacent the first and second ends;

inserting the appliance into an oropharyngeal region in a constrained configuration; and

releasing the appliance within the oropharyngeal region, thereby allowing the appliance to expand radially within the oropharyngeal region so that the central body portion extends generally laterally across the posterior wall and the end portions support the lateral walls of the oropharyngeal region.

105. (currently amended and withdrawn) The method of claim 104 wherein the appliance includes at least two [[of]] elements coupled together at the first and second ends and spaced apart from each other.

106. (currently amended and withdrawn) The method of claim 105 wherein at least one of the at least two elements includes a region between the first and second ends substantially

further spaced apart from the other of the at least two elements, thereby at least partially defining [[the]] relatively wide end portions.

107. (withdrawn) The method of claim 104 wherein the inserting step includes placing the appliance in or beneath the mucosal layer of the lateral and posterior walls of the oropharyngeal region.

108. (withdrawn) The method of claim 104 wherein the inserting step includes placing the appliance completely across the posterior wall of the oropharyngeal region.

109. (withdrawn) The method of claim 104 wherein the inserting step includes providing the appliance in a deformed first configuration, inserting the appliance into the oropharyngeal region and allowing the appliance to reconfigure to a deployed second configuration within the oropharyngeal region.

110. (withdrawn) The method of claim 104 wherein the appliance is made of nitinol.

111-124. (canceled)

125. (new) The method of claim 104, wherein the at least one element is substantially bow shaped with the appliance at rest.

126. (new) The method of claim 125, wherein the at least one element is pre-curved to a diameter larger than the oropharyngeal region, and wherein, in the constrained condition, the at least one element is sized for introduction into the oropharyngeal region.

127. (new) A method for treating at least one of sleep apnea and snoring, comprising:
introducing an appliance into an oropharyngeal region of a patient, the appliance comprising a transverse portion between end portions, the transverse portion being substantially bow shaped with the appliance at rest; and

securing the appliance within the oropharyngeal region such that the transverse portion extends along a posterior wall and at least partially around opposite lateral walls of the oropharyngeal region and the end portions support the tongue.

128. (new) The method of claim 127, wherein introducing the appliance into the oropharyngeal region comprises:

inserting the appliance into the oropharyngeal region in a constrained configuration; and
expanding the appliance to a deployed configuration within the oropharyngeal region.

129. (new) The method of claim 128, wherein the appliance is expanded by releasing the appliance, thereby allowing the appliance to resiliently expand radially within the oropharyngeal region.

130. (new) The method of claim 127, wherein the appliance provides a substantially constant radial force against the lateral walls of the oropharyngeal region.

131. (new) The method of claim 127, wherein the appliance provides a substantially constant radial force against the base of the tongue.

132. (new) The method of claim 127, wherein the appliance is secured within the oropharyngeal region such that the end portions extend around opposite lateral walls of the oropharyngeal region and support the tongue.

133. (new) The method of claim 132, wherein, upon contraction of the oropharyngeal region, the end portions are temporarily forced towards one another, the end portions biased to move away from one another to open the oropharyngeal region.

134. (new) The method of claim 132, wherein the end portions push the tongue forward to hold the airway patent.

135. (new) The method of claim 132, wherein the appliance extends around the airway such that the end portions traverse a base of the tongue.

136. (new) The method of claim 127, wherein the appliance is secured to the oropharyngeal region by suturing the appliance to the pharyngeal region.

137. (new) The method of claim 127, wherein the appliance is secured to the oropharyngeal region using an adhesive.

138. (new) The method of claim 127, wherein the appliance is secured to the oropharyngeal region by implanting the appliance at least partially submucosally.

139. (new) A method for treating at least one of sleep apnea and snoring in a human or an animal having an oropharyngeal region with lateral and posterior walls, comprising:

providing an appliance comprising an element having a length extending along a transverse portion from a first end portion to a second end portion, the element being substantially bow shaped with the appliance at rest;

inserting the appliance into an oropharyngeal region in a constrained configuration; and

releasing the appliance within the oropharyngeal region, thereby allowing the appliance to expand radially within the oropharyngeal region so that the transverse portion extends generally laterally across the posterior wall and supports the lateral walls of the oropharyngeal region.

140. (new) The method of claim 139, wherein the appliance is biased to resiliently expand radially within the oropharyngeal region when released.

141. (new) The method of claim 139, wherein the appliance provides a substantially constant radial force against the lateral walls of the oropharyngeal region.

142. (new) The method of claim 139, wherein the appliance provides a substantially constant radial force against the base of the tongue.

143. (new) The method of claim 139, wherein the appliance is secured within the oropharyngeal region such that the end portions extend around opposite lateral walls of the oropharyngeal region and support the tongue.

144. (new) The method of claim 143, wherein the end portions push the tongue forward to hold the airway patent.

145. (new) The method of claim 143, wherein the appliance extends around the airway such that the end portions traverse a base of the tongue.

146. (new) The method of claim 139, wherein the appliance includes two elements coupled together at the first and second end portions and spaced apart from each other such that the elements extend generally laterally across the posterior wall and support the lateral walls of the oropharyngeal region.

147. (new) A method for maintaining the patency of an airway of a patient, comprising:

introducing an appliance into an oropharyngeal region of the patient, the appliance comprising a transverse portion between spaced apart ends, the transverse portion being substantially bow shaped with the appliance at rest; and

securing the appliance within the oropharyngeal region such that the transverse portion extends at least partially around the oropharyngeal region and the end portions push the tongue forward to hold the airway patent.